

VIEWS

Mid-Region Council of Governments

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MRCOG Asks Legislators to Empower Communities

Regional Transit Districts Proposed

One of New Mexico's strengths is its diversity. Go anywhere in the state, and you'll find diversity in our cultures and our demographic and socioeconomic blueprint.

So when you talk about trying to organize and fund transit service that crosses jurisdictional boundaries, the issue gets complicated. As a result, the possible solutions must get creative. Every community in New Mexico has different needs when it comes to transit service. This topic has been tossed about for some time in New Mexico and the Albuquerque urban area, and now MRCOG is working with communities to move a step closer to implementing their own regional transit service.

In January, MRCOG will ask Legislators to enable the voluntary creation of Regional Transit Districts (RTDs) throughout the State of New Mexico. The proposed legislation would allow jurisdictions to join together to initiate a process to establish an RTD. Each RTD would have the authority to develop and implement a regional transit service plan based on the needs of the individual region.

The legislation is being designed to be flexible enough to accommodate the needs of both rural and urban communities in New Mexico. It would create a framework that allows individual communities to determine what cooperative structure best serves the needs of the region.

An important provision in the bill would allow each community the choice of whether or not to join an RTD, but would allow an RTD to exist without participation from all the jurisdictions within a region.

The legislation also includes a request for state matching funds to help local governments with the costs of establishing RTDs and the development of transit service plans.

In New Mexico, funding for public transit has been the responsibility of local governments, with decreasing assistance from the federal government. In contrast, transit operations in other states are funded by a combination of local, federal, and state money, with states contributing an average of 22%, the federal government 4%, local governments 20%, and passenger fares the remaining 37%. RTDs can promote a more balanced funding mechanism in New Mexico, by leveraging available federal funds and by encouraging dedicated state funding for transit.

Welcome to MRCOG's **VIEWS**



I would like to welcome you to the inaugural edition of MRCOG's quarterly newsletter. We want to provide our readers with current information and provocative articles on regional issues.

MRCOG recognizes that the strengths in our communities lie in our ability to work together. Our support for Regional Transit Districts provides an exciting opportunity for MRCOG to work with the legislature to serve the state and its member governments by embracing this complex topic. It's all about empowering our local communities. We look forward to initiating a new era of transit organizations across the state that are implemented and directed by the people of the regions they serve.

Lawrence Rael
MRCOG Executive Director

One valuable benefit transit service can provide is reducing the area's vehicle miles of travel by offering alternatives to driving alone. Reducing vehicle miles means reducing pollution. Approximately 60% of harmful carbon monoxide emissions are from vehicle sources. In the Albuquerque urban area, vehicle miles of travel more than tripled between 1970 and 1999. This additional travel has increased pollution and contributed to the city's need during the last 15 years to implement a mandatory emissions test for all vehicles registered in Bernalillo County. Now, other area communities are looking at implementing vehicle emissions regulations to address the so-called "brown cloud".

Regional transit can be an efficient method for providing service to and from a variety of destinations for shopping, medical services and jobs. Transit that reaches across jurisdictional boundaries connects communities and serves the commuting public, thereby reducing vehicle miles of travel along with the pollution caused by that travel. In addition, this type of program expands medical service, social and economic opportunities for the elderly, while increasing job opportunities for transit-dependent working adults. By joining together communities reduce administrative overhead, and ensure that the majority of the funds set aside for transit go to providing services to their citizens. ■

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Did you know . . . ?

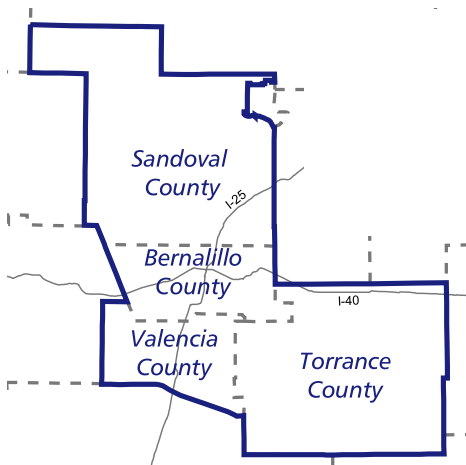
MRCOG's 4-county planning region
contains

40% of the state's population
and

**47% of the state's
nonagricultural jobs**

Mid-Region Council of Governments

Central New Mexico



MRCOG Board Adopts Legislative Policies for the 2003 Session

In anticipation of the upcoming session of the New Mexico Legislature, the MRCOG Board of Directors has adopted a resolution establishing regional legislative policies that it will support during the 2003 Legislative Session.

n Policy: Support for the State to consider using the seven State Planning and Development Districts any time sub-state areas are identified in program implementation.

n Policy: Support State funding for the seven State Planning and Development Districts.

Both of the above policy statements maintain and enhance the organizational functions of the MRCOG. The first policy points out the common-sense efficiencies that may be achieved with standardized multi-county regions in the state for a variety of programs and services. Consistent sub-state planning boundaries could eliminate the overlap among area-wide programs, simplify data and information resources, and enhance the coordination of numerous agencies and jurisdictions in a specific region. The second policy statement supports continuing state funding for MRCOG and the other regional organizations to sustain and improve their unique services.



n Policy: Support enabling legislation establishing Regional Transit Districts throughout the State of New Mexico, with a funding mechanism to allow development and implementation of regional transportation plans developed by those Districts. (See front page)

A copy of the complete MRCOG Legislative Policies for the Year 2003 Legislative Session is available on request from the MRCOG office.

n Policy: Support the establishment and funding of a State Office of Planning to ensure integrated decision-making of the State's transportation, natural resources, water, environment, mobility, housing and historic preservation plans and programs.

Continued growth in New Mexico places increasing burdens on our natural resources such as water, air quality, and the environment, and, on mobility and housing. If we are to preserve our quality of life and the quality of our environment, coordinated planning must take place at the State level, as well as the local level. The framework currently exists for the State to utilize the Councils of Governments in conjunction with a State Planning Office to coordinate regional and statewide planning functions.

n Policy: Support continued state funding for regional water planning efforts administered through the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, specifically dealing with the implementation phase and future updates of the Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan.

Preservation and efficient use of water resources is a high priority issue in this region as well as statewide. A regional water plan is scheduled to be completed in 2003 for the Middle Rio Grande area, along with other regional water plans throughout the state. Significant work remains to be carried out to implement and maintain these regional plans. Continued funding for state and regional water planning is crucial for New Mexico to ensure protection of its water resources for the future.

n Policy: Increase State funding of the Local Government Corrections Fund.

County detention costs have dramatically increased due to the number of offenders being placed in county detention centers. Several counties in New Mexico are now on the verge of bankruptcy as a result of overwhelming detention costs. MRCOG supports increased state funding assistance to the Local Government Corrections Fund to reduce the cost burden.

n Policy: Support continued funding of the in-plant training funds.

Consistent and adequate funding is necessary to maintain the state's In-Plant Training program, which has proven to be an effective state-wide economic development tool. This program helps offset the employer's cost of training new hires. ■

MRCOG Helps City's Plan "Take Flight"

MRCOG is designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) as an Economic Development District. In this capacity, MRCOG is able to assist entities and organizations to develop EDA applications.

Currently, MRCOG is helping the City of Albuquerque secure much needed development funds from the Federal Government. EDA invited the City of Albuquerque to submit an application for 1.5 million dollars in financial assistance. This money would be used to install telephone lines and drainage structures at Double Eagle II Airport on the City's far west side. The City is currently making substantial infrastructure improvements at Double Eagle II Airport to prepare for a new aircraft manufacturing facility that will be constructed by Eclipse Aviation. Eclipse anticipates hiring 1,800 additional employees by the year 2007. MRCOG staff worked with the City of Albuquerque staff in writing the EDA preapplication proposal.



Photo courtesy of Eclipse Aviation.

MRCOG staff has helped several organizations and governing bodies procure important EDA financial assistance. Among them: Bernalillo County/Rio Grande Community Development Corporation received \$900,000 for its South Valley Kitchen Incubator/Commercial Kitchen; the City of Albuquerque/Sandia Science and Technology Park Development Corporation procured \$1 million for fiber-optics infrastructure at the Sandia Science and Technology Park; and the City of Albuquerque Department of Family and Community Services netted \$1 million for utility improvements and landscaping at the Old Albuquerque High School. These are all significant activities critical to the mission of growth and economic development in the mid-region. ■

Regional Water Plan Approaching Crucial Stages of Development

Significant progress has been made in the development of a regional water plan for the Middle Rio Grande Region. This advancement follows extensive work including hundreds of volunteer hours by members of the Mid-Region Council of Governments Water Resources Board (WRB) and the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly (WA). The two groups began working to develop the plan back in 1998 under a contract with the Interstate Stream Commission. This regional water planning effort includes a broad range of region-wide public involvement and public education.

Several crucial work items need to be accomplished to complete development of the water plan. These include:

- Analysis and identification of acceptable alternative actions and their implications for either saving water or finding additional water resources as part of scenario building for the final water plan.
- Development of draft preferred scenarios (groups of acceptable alternative actions) for public presentation and participation, tentatively scheduled for mid-March 2003.
- Coordination of the Joint Powers Agreement with the Cuba Soil and Water Conservation District for the Rio Puerco and Rio Jemez subregions for critical input and plan development for the subregions.
- Coordination of contracts for facilitation of key segments of the water plan for public hearings and regional forums scheduled for March and July 2003 respectively; for public outreach coordination and for technical review, editing and compiling the draft and final water plan.
- Incorporation of public comments into the draft water plan for review and comment by the Water Resources Board in August 2003.
- Review, revision and approvals by the Water Resources Board and its member governments.
- Finalization of the Regional Water Plan for presentation and acceptance by the WRB and its member governments for submittal in final form to the Interstate Stream Commission, scheduled for October 2003.
- Establishment of a process for the Implementation Phase of the regional water plan through meetings with local governments to develop model ordinances, resolutions or policy documents for adoption by the local governments in their respective jurisdictions. ■

MRCOG Busy with Comprehensive Planning for Local Governments

Comprehensive plans for cities, towns, villages, and counties are generating new interest throughout the region. Limited funding for planning grants is available through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program administered by the Local Government Division of the N.M. Dept. of Finance and Administration. MRCOG's Regional Planning staff is currently developing comprehensive land use plans for the City of Belen, Torrance County, and City of Moriarty. A comprehensive plan has already been completed for the Town of Bernalillo and is awaiting final approval by the Town Council.

These comprehensive plans are being done as special project work programs and are initiated through planning service agreements between MRCOG and individual local governments.

One of the unique features of these comprehensive plans is the process for incorporating public input in the development of the plan. MRCOG conducts and evaluates citizen surveys to help define the community's goals and objectives for future development. Workshops and public hearings are also used to ensure sound support for the final plan recommendations. Each comprehensive plan also presents a "Community Profile" that is a result of data analysis, historical research, inventories of facilities and services, and evaluation of community systems. ■



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2003 Legislative Policies
Adopted by MRCOG Board of Directors
Including:

- n Support for using COGs as sub-state areas for program implementation
- n Support for Regional Transit Districts throughout New Mexico (Page 1)
- n Support the establishment of a State Planning Office
- n Funding for Regional Water Planning (Page 3)
- n Increased funds for county detention costs
- n Support for funding for employment training

For more information on the legislative policies see Page 2

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